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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE; PLEASE PASS TO NSC FOR ADAM STERLING

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [HU](#)

SUBJECT: CAN THE CENTER HOLD?: HUNGARY'S SMALL PARTIES  
FIGHT (EACH OTHER) FOR SURVIVAL

REF: BUDAPEST 950 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: P/E COUNSELOR ERIC V. GAUDIOSI; REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Hungary's "independent opposition parties" find themselves locked in conflict for centrist voters, fighting for what little oxygen is left from the raging conflict between the MSzP and FIDESZ.

THE SZDSZ: INTERNAL BLEEDING

¶2. (SBU) In the past weeks, the SzDSz has lost both public support and political credibility. The divide between the supporters of Party President Gabor Fodor and his predecessor, Janos Koka remains deep, and elections for lower-ranking positions continue to reflect a 51-49 split between the party's two factions.

¶3. (C) Unable to address these internal conflicts or to exact major concessions from the MSzP (reftel), the SzDSz is left in a state of limbo: their reformist policies are at variance with the public mood, their coffers are reportedly low, and their long-time administration of Budapest has opened the party up to serious charges of incompetence ... or worse. As a result, the SzDSz's poll numbers remain well below the five percent threshold required for representation in Parliament despite the fact that up to twenty percent of Hungarians identify themselves as liberals.

¶4. (C) Although insiders admit that the party has been in decline for years, it has been able to rely on the tacit and the overt support of the MSzP in recent elections. With the demise of their coalition, however, Socialist MP Attila Mesterhazy tells us that "our voters hate the SzDSz so much now they wouldn't help them if we asked them to." Without that support, the SzDSz's prognosis is negative.

THE MDF: JUST A FLESH WOUND?

¶5. (C) Though better off than the SzDSz, the MDF is weakened as well. An ugly wiretapping scandal preceding the party elections has revealed intense competition within the party leadership (septel), and Party President Ibolya David survived her reelection bid with a substantially lower share of the votes than she received in 2006. Her rival, MP Kornel Almassy, was expelled from the party praesidium at their September 27 convention and has vowed to take his appeal to the courts.

¶6. (C) Although party insiders complain that much of the conflict has been fostered by FIDESZ, others admit that there are generational tensions within the party as well as growing frustration with David's inability to approach her stated goal of ten percent in the polls. (Note: That Dr. David continues to rank among the most popular politicians in Hungary only adds to the ire of many. End Note.) Many of the MDF's policy positions have been taken over by the larger parties, and their public rhetoric about being "the party of

Hungary's productive tax-payers" is unlikely to win converts in a society where tax evasion runs rampant. Moreover, repeated charges of their collusion with either FIDESZ or the MSzP have caused the party's presumptive hold on the moral high ground to slip.

AND THE GOOD NEWS ...

¶7. (C) The footing is treacherous even on the moral low ground. The far-right Magyar Garda has been rocked by a series of resignations at senior levels, with the paramilitary group's "commander" stepping down in light of concerns regarding the "political motives" of MG founder and JOBBIK Party President Gabor Vona. Although replacements have quickly been named, the resignations have been an embarrassment for the Garda, which has carefully managed its public image to date. (Note: As one observer commented, "Vona may be a clever man leading a bunch of morons." End Note.)

A HIGHER COEFFICIENT OF FRICTION

¶8. (C) Comment: The tectonic plates of Hungarian politics are shifting. With FIDESZ's attempts to move toward the center ) which provide an opening for the far right - both the SzDSz and the MDF are fighting each other for political survival at the center of the spectrum. Although personal animosities prevent Fodor's cooperation with Prime Minister Gyurcsany or David's with FIDESZ leader Viktor Orban, the sharp differences between the MDF and SzDSz over social issues will also likely prevent their cooperation with each other. At a time when the public mood is polarized, neither

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has made significant inroads with undecided voters. If their conflict continues, one ) or both ) of the "independent opposition" parties may falter in the next elections. That would bring Hungary a step closer to the two-party system some analysts believe is the ultimate destination. End Comment.  
Foley